

18 May 1972

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: 16 May 1972 Meeting of USIB Representatives
on the Current Situation in Vietnam

1. As agreed at the initial meeting on 12 May 1972, the meeting opened with an Air Force briefing on the current US aerial interdiction effort against North Vietnam. The brief consisted of an identification of principal targets hit thus far, the showing of some post-strike photography, a description of some of the ordnance being used, and an explanation of the targeting concept and of the command and control arrangements. The briefer stressed that in contrast to previous Rolling Thunder campaigns, more targets had been cleared for attack, including some inside the 10 mile "rings" around Hanoi and Haiphong. Another difference was that operational control, within prescribed guidelines, has been passed from Washington down to the field level.

2. There was further discussion of the bombing campaign in which it was agreed that we still lack any

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firm estimates of the extent of North Vietnamese stockpiles (suspected to be large). For this reason and because it has not yet been possible to do much systematic bomb damage assessment, it is not possible to make any useful assessment of Hanoi's current or prospective ability to maintain large-scale military operations.

3. The meeting then reviewed the movement of Soviet naval vessels in the area and agreed that whatever the destinations of particular ships, it seemed clear that a decision had been made to develop a significant naval presence in the South China Sea area. It was noted that this presence would give the Soviets various options including entry into the Gulf of Tonkin where efforts might be made to escort cargo vessels, provide a naval SAM cover to lighter operations, interfere with the maneuvers of US naval units, etc. While the assembled experts agreed that the presence of Soviet vessels, including submarines, in the area would cause the 7th Fleet a degree of concern, the majority view was that the Soviets would not enter the Gulf of Tonkin at least while the leaders of the US and the USSR were engaged in talks in Moscow.

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4. For the remainder of the session, the conclusions of a DIA paper, Soviet and Chinese Responses to New US Military Initiatives in Southeast Asia, were used as a basis for an exchange of views. It was determined that all agencies hold similar views on the major questions of interest with respect to Soviet and Chinese interests in the current situation and their likely courses of action, though some participants rate more highly than others the chances that the Chinese will create problems for the USSR in the course of negotiations for expanded Soviet shipments through China.

5. The Representatives agreed to meet again on 19 May for the purpose of once again exchanging views on key points and insuring that the briefings prepared on a departmental basis are either consistent within the community or take into account any significant differences within the community.



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